

KARTARPUR CORRIDOR: DIVERGENT DIMENSIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON PAKISTAN AND INDIA

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ALLAMA MUHAMMAD IQBAL remembers Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, in his poetry book, *Bang-e-Dara* (143), as ‘mard-i-kamil’ and scholars know as to who can be a ‘mard-i-kamil’ of Allama Iqbal. Allama Muhammad Iqbal believes in the piety, prowess, and action to counter and challenge injustice and inhumanity:

Phir uti akhir sada Tauheed ki Punjab se
Hind ko ek Mard-i-Kamil ne jagaya khwab se

Translation: It is Punjab from where again a voice of Oneness of God appeared.
The voice of this Perfect Man rekindled India/Hindustan dragging it
from the intellectual lethargy.

Punjab is proud of its intellectual and cultural heritage it offered to its inhabitants and the world. This creative land gave birth to several religious traditions and intellectual movements. Guru Nanak Dev is one of the iconic figures the fertile land of Punjab produced. The land has been a liberal and moderate land and the historical evidence corroborates the narrative that no persecution of the first Hindu who accepted Islam was witnessed at the hand of the Hindu majority. No doubt, it is the land of peace as no heavy weapon was found in the excavation of the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization but still the land of prowess and bravery as there are rare blatant examples of anti-British drive as exhibited by Ram Muhammad Singh Azad (real name Udham Singh). Besides fortitude, it mushroomed new religions and political movements. Sikhism a new religious tradition was founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539). Guru Nanak Dev spent last 18 years of his life in Kartarpur Sahib, the village named and inhabited by the Guru himself.

Kartarpur is situated near Shakargarh but before August 1947 it was a part of District Gurdaspur which produced famous personalities such as Urdu poet Barkat Ram Zaman, Punjabi poet Shiv Kumar Batalvi, and politician Sir Fazl-i-Husain. Kartarpur is very close to the Indo-Pakistan border. Although India-Pakistan boundary line stretches over 2980 km (2240+740 LoC) touching the held-Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Rajasthan etc. on Indian side and AJ & Kashmir, Punjab and Sindh on the Pakistani side. Guru Nanak Dev spent last 18 years (1521-

1539) for agricultural activities on his land. Kartarpur was the first village that was founded and inhabited by Guru Nanak Dev. It was the first place wherein first Gurdwara was established and the first *Langarkhana* was set up and run by Guru Nanak Dev. First Sikh sangat or community was shaped on the same land under the aegis of Guru Nanak Dev. Many claim that Guru Nanak Dev never preached new religion and he always replied to the question, who are you, Hindu or Muslim?, 'na mein Hindu, na mein Musalman' but he appointed Lehna Je the next Guru as Guru Angad Je which verifies that Guru Nanak Dev knew that he was laying the foundation of a new religion which needed its custodians in the coming times. So the first Sikh community appeared at Kartarpur Sahib which highlights the importance of this village to the Sikhs and others. A notable point is that the Punjab being a liberal land respects all religions, cultures and ideals. This capaciousness is so paramount that sometimes it touches the extreme point of passiveness and apathy. Guru Nanak Dev is said to be away from preaching his ideals but history tells that he publicly expressed his beliefs at Multan *mela* although the text of this exhortation could not be preserved but on the daring expression he was arrested by Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi because it was translated by the reporters as an anti-government and Islam drive. This may be considered as the first public speech relating to his religious tenets by the Guru because in the previous discussion he only pointed out injustice, superstitious and wrongdoings in a debate and sometimes in sarcastic style. This successful style proved success to make the people aware about the maxim of good and bad. Kartarpur is the place where the Guru completed his Bani. The 2nd Guru, Angad lived in Kartarpur Sahib and Guru Nanak Dev instead of his sons Sri Chand and Lakhmi Chand appointed Angad je as the next Guru with advice to move from Kartarpur.

The story of Kartarpur is full of interesting facts. The River Ravi flows close to Kartarpur therefore the floods ruined this 16th century building. Maharaja Ranjit Singh worked on this village but the real services were rendered by Bhopindar Singh, Maharaja of Patiala (grandfather of Capt. Amrindar Singh, CM Punjab) who donated more than 6 lakh rupees for the construction of the new building and renovation of the place. During the period of 1920-1929, the construction of the present building completed but the partition of India changed the scenario of the region and the Redcliff Award handed over these areas to Pakistan which forced the Sikhs to migrate from this area to Indian Punjab. Kartarpur Gurdwara remained closed after 1947 because no Sikh was there to use it as a learning base and it being a border area was also a sensitive place for both the Pakistani and Indian armies. Although a train ran through this village area and it had station and platform but all was almost demolished after 1947 because of the apathetic attitude of the governments. The Punjabis in general and Sikhs in particular were the most affected population because of the 1947 partition and the India-Pakistan rivalry. Despite all odds, this place remained alive and intact because of the Muslims who have profound respect for Guru Nanak Dev. Jatts especially the Randhawa clan of the areas maintained the modesty and sacredness of the place and arranged cleanliness of the building and the surrounding. In the 1950s, the Sikhs started Ardas in which they daily prayed to God to provide them an open opportunity to see Kartarpur and other holy Sikh places lying in Pakistan. Sikhs fixed a point near Dera Baba Nanak Sahib on Indian side to see a slight view or Darshan of the Kartarpur Gurdwara. In the 1965 War between India and Pakistan, the bridge on the River Ravi was destroyed as a defence strategy. Pippa Wirdee thinks, during the Sikh struggle for Khalistan in the 1980s, few Sikhs had access to this Gurdwara. Narowal separating from Sialkot was created

as an independent district in 1991. During the peacemaking move between Pakistan and India in 1998-99, Mian Nawaz Sharif and Indian PM Vajpaae concluded friendly session but the prevailing bitterness blocked any wave of cordiality. During the years of 1990 and 2000s, the government of Pakistan started the repairing work on the Gurdwara Sahib. During 2004-5, Gen. Parvez Musharraf and India agreed to open Kartarpur, Lahore, Amritsar roads and Railway line of Khokhrapar and Monabao but could not succeed. Pakistan People's Party also maintained the same policy. Many object the PPP government especially Aitzaz Ahsan (ex-interior minister) that he handed over the list of the Sikh struggling for Khalistan but he rejected this allegation. The May 2018 elections gave popular mandate to Pakistan Tahreek-i-Insaf and Imran Khan Niazi took oath as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Being cricketer Imran Khan invited Kapil Dev, Novjot Singh Sidhu and Sunil Gawaskar to join him in the oath ceremony but due to pressure by the Bhartiya Janata Party and media only Novjot Singh Sidhu turned up and participated in the ceremony. Novjot Singh Sidhu's marvelous entry added a new chapter in the political and religious histories of Pakistan, India and Sikhism. The Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, embraced Sidhu and he reciprocated in the same zeal which infuriated the Indian politicians and media. Novjot Sidhu retaliated with more forceful enthusiasm and dealt all questions raised by the opponents daringly with sound cultural, moral and religious arguments. He alleged that the Indian Prime Minister was ignored so he was jealous oo the Pakistani Prime Minister's invitation.

On 28 November 2019, Imran Khan inaugurated the Kartarpur Corridor's project in a prestigious ceremony attended by Novjot Singh Sidhu (Congress)¹ and Har Simrat Kaur Badil (Akali) who made religiously emotional speeches and thanked the Pakistani and Indian governments on the friendly understanding regarding the corridor. This step is being perceived as a sincere effort of Imran Khan, Gen. Qamar Javaid Bajwa and Novjot Singh Sidhu. Sikhs and Muslims believe that these three leaders have honoured Guru Nanak Dev in true sense and his followers by creating an environment which helped permit the Kartarpur Corridor, a visa-free visit for the Sikh pilgrims. Jaiteg Singh Anant expressed Sikh emotions of happiness and thanked Imran Khan on this endeavour. Jathedar Kuldeep Singh Wadala (d. 6 June 2018) has been visiting the border (Dera Baba Nanak Sahib) since 2001 and came to the border area for more than 400 times with *langar* just to sensitise the desire and demand of the Sikhs to open this border point so that they could visit this sacred place. But honour went to Sidhu who proved an 'ambassador of Muslim-Sikh unity.'² The Pakistani government has assigned the FWO to work

¹Novjot Singh Sidhu belongs to Patiala Area. His father Sardar Bhagwant Singh Advocate remained district president of the Congress.

²Jaiteg Singh Anant in a program ਸਾਡਾ ਵਿਰਸਾ (Sada Virsa) with Jai Teg Singh Anant (Writer) and Dr. Baljinder Singh Cheema, https://www.facebook.com/Sanjhatv/videos/220583158871455/U_zpfSTExNTg1NTUzNjA4Njc3ODM6MjE4OTgxMzU4MTA3NTI4NA/ 1 January 2019.

on the Corridor and November 2019 (550th Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev) has been fixed as the completion time.

Randhawa family and the local administration looked after the building and surroundings of Kartarpur sahib. This shows devotion of the Muslims towards Guru Nanak Dev. This sacred place remained a symbol of respect and blessings and credit goes to the local Muslims who maintained its sanctity and importance. Despite less facilitated, the religious glamour, glory and radiance of this sacred place was retained by the Muslims when the Sikhs had no access to it. Before the partition of 1947, Shakargarh was a Tehsil of Gurdaspur district and the distance of Kartarpur is 6 km from Shakargarh. Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib is 3 km away in Pakistan from Pak-India border while Dera Baba Nanak Sahib (Gurdwara Shri Darbar Sahib) is only 1 km from Pak-India border on Indian side. Both the places are related to Guru Nanak Dev and his family.

INTERPRETATIONS OF KARTARPUR CORRIDOR

1. Although, the Kartarpur Corridor has direct impact on the Pakistan-India relationship but interestingly it will affect the internal politics and social trends of India in general and the Punjab in particular. The electoral history of India verifies that the ruling political party of India always uses anti-Pakistan propaganda to win the elections. But the understanding on the Kartarpur Corridor will suffocate the traditional strategy in the Indian electioneering campaign despite the fact the BJP will revive the enmity with Pakistan. We see the confused BJP sometimes talks against Pakistan and some time tries to take credit of the Kartarpur Corridor. The Indian government has decided to issue a currency having picture of the Sikh Guru. They have also decided to commemorate this year as the year of Guru Nanak Dev.

The Lok Sabha elections are likely to be held in March 2019 while the threatening environment created by the central government has made the Punjab's Chief Minister scared and under-pressure therefore, he did not come to Pakistan on the earth-breaking ceremony of the Kartarpur Corridor despite his family has direct and undeniable contribution to the history of Kartarpur sahib and he is said to be retired from the politics after this tenure. The CM is under a constant pressure that PM Modi can topple his government and impose governor rule in the Punjab if some mistake is made by the Congressite CM. The main focus of the Congress is the state and the Lok Sabha elections.

2. Political Scene in India:

Congress has got popularity in the Punjab because of the daring and practical politics demonstrated by the Jatt Minister, Navjot Singh Sidhu. Sikhs believe that being friend of Imran Khan, Sidhu was honoured in Pakistan. They are also of the opinion that players are always bold and habitual of taking risk so Imran Khan and Sidhu exhibited the same zeal and enthusiasm and won the day. Kartarpur Langha is a tremendous achievement of Sidhu that has cracked the Akali Dal circles as well because under the religious fervor many Akali leaders admire Sidhu's overture and achievement. Therefore, in the coming elections, BJP will lose many seats in the Punjab and Congress will be elevated to a more

effective position. The well-known daily *The News* analysed about the internal politics of India that both the political parties are trying to project the Kartarpur Corridor as their respective success. The paper writes that the BJP government seems unserious to materialize the hopes of the Sikhs regarding the completion of the Kartarpur project because of the lack of consensus among all the departments. They are taking up this project as a political gimmick in the coming elections therefore the reality will surface out after the elections.³

3. Internal Stability of Pakistan:

The offer to open the border to access the Kartarpur Sahib has infused a sense of confidence among the Pakistani minorities. The initiative and development on the Kartarpur Corridor for the Sikhs has defused the anti-Pakistan propaganda as for several years a strong lobby has been propagating on the plight of the minorities in Pakistan but now the world has come to know about the real social setup of Pakistan. By this move and by completion of Kartarpur Corridor, the extremism will be discouraged in Pakistan and such facilitation will redress the Sikh grievances if existed.

4. Message to Indian Sikhs:

The initiative on Kartarpur Corridor taken by the Pakistani government has blocked the Indian propaganda in which the Sikhs were misguided that the Pakistani Muslims did not respect the Gurdwaras and the Sikh sacred places. In the past, Sikhs were brainwashed that the Gurdwaras in Pakistan were full of dirt (Muslman gandgi sutt dende ne) and they had demolished the Sikh sacred buildings but now Sikhs are obviously very clear about the Indian blame game against Pakistan.

5. Indian Internal Situation:

By the India government, the Kartarpur Corridor initiative was taken as a political gimmick. Initially, the approval of Kartarpur Corridor was not included in the cabinet meeting agenda but was enlisted later and its main objective was to counter the Pakistan's move.⁴ BJP intended not to approve of this corridor but the rejection could end the BJP and Akali Dal in the Punjab therefore the BJP's hate-ridden politics failed to penetrate further in the Punjab and they approved of this project. The Sikhs got confidence because of the Pakistan's respect for Sikhism and the moral and political support to the Sikh community.

6. Step towards Religious Harmony in Pakistan:

The role of religio-political parties is usually criticized especially being against the minority rights, but the world has witnessed that neither religious people nor religio-political parties opposed the Kartarpur Corridor that is a good sign of accommodating attitude of the religious political parties towards the Sikhs. A weak sound on Qadian few

³Daily, *The News* (Lahore), 29 January 2019.

⁴Jaiteg Singh Anant, TV Sanjha

miles from the border was listened which makes no point and it was not taken up by any faction because it has no substance at all.

7. Pakistan's Image at International Level:

The Kartarpur Corridor has been taken as a liberal gesture at international level and Pakistan is being admired as an anti-terrorism and liberal country. In a meeting of UN human rights chapter, Dr. Jasdev Singh Rai, an eminent writer and human rights activist, appreciated Imran Khan's endeavour to facilitate the Sikh community. Now the Sikhs in UK and other continents feel that Sikhs are safe in Pakistan. To dent this situation, the BJP forces in the coming days will try to sabotage this mutual understanding just to reassert in politics with their extremist agenda. In January 2019, the Pakistan's government appointed Dr. Faisal as focal person on the Kartarpur Corridor project and sent the draft proposals to the Indian government to expedite the dialogue regarding the final agreement. The government also proposed to appoint some focal person in India so that both the countries may approach some viable route to achieve consensus on the feasibility report. On 22 January 2019, the Indian government threw the proposal back to Pakistan and sought the Pakistani delegation to come to Delhi to further talk on the project which Dr. Faisal declared as a delaying and childish tactic.⁵ The Indian mischievous intentions intend to cripple the sincere effort of the Pakistani government which would be detrimental to the peacekeeping efforts in the South Asian region.

8. Religious Economy:

At the moment, both the countries have agreed to launch the Kartarpur project with a limited number of pilgrims. India had consented to the points relating to exchange of visitors as proposed by Pakistan and the process will continue to create an environment of understanding until the completion of the project. The document presented by Pakistan permits the Sikhs only a 4-hour stay in the Kartarpur Sahib which will remain open from 8 am to 5 pm daily; the visitors will have to apply a month before the proposed date of the visit and on approval, the visitors will be issued permits. The visitors having valid passports will get security clearance from the Indian government and come to Kartarpur in a group of 15 persons. The Indian government will provide the visitors' list to Pakistan three days before the visit date. The visitors will eat nothing except *Parshad*⁶ during the stay at Kartarpur. Apparently, it seems awkward to force the pilgrims to move out the place after few hours and they are not allowed to buy anything even then it is the biggest blessing for the Sikhs to be allowed to visit this sacred place. If proved successful, both the countries may facilitate the pilgrims more in future as Pakistan has issued a new visa policy on 25 January 2019 which permits the Sikhs having US and Canadian nationalities

⁵Daily, *Jang* (Lahore), 22-23 January 2019; see also, daily, *Express* (Lahore) 22 January 2019.

⁶Daily, *Jang* (Lahore), 30 December 2018.

to apply for visa even on the arrival at the Pakistani airports.⁷ Therefore ultimately, this sacred place will be able to secure the same status as being enjoyed by other religious places of the world. So both Pakistan and India will get economic benefit from this corridor especially Pakistan will secure more economic benefits than India. Visitors coming to Pakistan from all over the world will travel, eat, stay and buy from the holy places which will play an important role in the economy. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq earn a lot from the religious means and they attain not only commercial benefits from travel, food, stay, shopping, taxes, etc. but also secure sympathy in their minds which helps in the people to people contact. Such endeavours directly affect the foreign policy of the countries.

Conclusion:

The Kartarpur Corridor, being a revolutionary step, will cast a tremendous impact on the politics of India and social setup of Pakistan but situating on the Pakistan-India border, it will never be freed from watch, monitoring and supervision by the agencies of both the rival countries which can hatch any conspiracy anytime. Kartarpur Corridor is presented as the Pakistan's credit therefore India will try to sabotage the project India will never tolerate the success of Pakistan in the foreign and internal affairs. Therefore, I am doubtful about the maturity of this understanding. Another reservation and notable point is that both the governments will carve their respective administrative influence in the affairs relating to permit, process of the permit, documentation, searching the visitors, suspicion on the visitors which can be resented by the Sikhs. Therefore, Pakistani government should recruit Sikh personnel along with other Pakistani officials for this job. Pakistan ought to devise a mechanism to ensure respect and security of the Sikh visitors. To avoid any embarrassment and propaganda, the Pakistani policymakers should work out the contingency plan to counter any emergency and embarrassing situation. The facilitation of the Sikhs should be the main objective of any policy designed or to be designed by the Pakistani authorities.

Recommendations:

The governments of Pakistan and India will have to realize their main responsibilities to materialize the hopes of the Sikhs and peoples of the world. The spirit of the agreement between Pakistan and India can be maintained by taking the measures on the basis of the religious harmony in its true sense:

1. Holy places should not to be politicized. Dr. Faisal or foreign office of Pakistan should not retaliate against the ill-tempered and irritable statements made by the Indian politicians or officials on the Kartarpur Corridor because by doing so Pakistan will provide India an opportunity to damage the undertaken noble cause.

⁷Daily, *Dawn* (Lahore), 26 January 2019.

2. Mechanism of safety, monitoring, and administration must be chalked out extensively before launching the Kartarpur Corridor project.
3. Despite the effort to keep this project limited, basic facilities such as medical treatment, water in winter and hot weathers, arrangements compatible to the temperature, electricity and related staff, etc. will broaden its horizon and ultimately much will be required to do on and by both the sides. Therefore, the administrations should be mentally prepared to deal with the changing situations.
4. Although the Corridor is being said to covering 4 km but in fact it will stretch by the time over vast areas so what will be the status of this area will be the major question. Will it be a neutral stretch like Vatican City? Under Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (of India or Pakistan or joint or purely governments)? Will it function under Auqaf or federal government? These points should be taken up immediately.
5. If dispute emerged, what will be the mechanism to resolve it; and who will solve it? Sikh representation should be made compulsory in such situation.